

\*\*\* NETANSWERS INTERNET EXTRA \*\*\*

For the week of March 2, 1998

This week, Kevin uses Internet language translators to decipher foreign tongues. How well do they work and where can you find them? Read on.

=\*=\*= FILIGREES OF SILVER AND GOLD =\*=\*=

Have you ever received an e-mail message from a stranger, written in a language that you can't read? That has happened to me many times in the years I've been using the Internet. It happened again yesterday: I received a message, written in Spanish, from a person in Argentina.

I took Spanish for three years in high school, but a) that was a long time ago and b) I didn't do that well in those classes. Deciphering the message myself wasn't likely. So I turned to the Web for help. The AltaVista search engine offers a translation tool. With it, you can translate text between English and five other languages: French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish. You can access it by pointing your web browser to <http://altavista.digital.com> and pressing the Translate button (near the top of the page). It can translate any text that you enter, or an entire web page.

A quick way to get a translation of an e-mail message is to copy it to the clipboard then paste the text into the space at AltaVista's translation page. Choose the type of translation you want (in this case, Spanish to English) and press the button. In a moment, the translated text will appear!

The results can be, well, questionable. No computer can translate text as well as a human fluent in two languages -- so AltaVista's translations can be imprecise or downright confusing. The site admits "Computerized translations often miss subtle meanings of words and don't accurately present many common sayings. AltaVista Translation Assistant provides you with a tool to translate a grammatically correct document into something comprehensible, but not perfect."

For example, here's the translated version of the Spanish e-mail I received:

I go to you in order to ask for information about the Nro.  
of email or another data (like to be published books,  
information, etc) of the commune of Campoligure, but indeed  
on filigrees of silver and gold, since alli is the national  
center of the filigree. I am student of Beautiful Arts in the  
city of Rosary and ademas I make artesanias of filigree and  
I investigate on the subject. Being thankful from already  
in which they could help an affectionate greeting me, thanks.

A precise translation it isn't, but it is clear enough to give me an idea of what the sender is asking. It's certainly better than I could do with those long-forgotten years of Spanish class.

(If you have a warped sense of humor, it can be fun to translate perfectly good English text to another language and back again, just to see how munged it can become. I will spare you a hideous example.)

The service can also translate web pages. After you enter the URL of a web page, it will access that page, translate the text and display the translated text in

your browser window. Translated web pages are generally understandable -- the short, choppy phrases frequently used on the Web can often be translated clearly. On the down side, translated pages are often stripped of their graphics. Pressing a hotlink returns you to AltaVista's translation page, where you are one click away from translating and viewing the linked page.

There are other Web-based translators as well -- you can find a list of them at <http://rivendel.com/~ric/resources/dictad-2.html#freetrans>. Many of the services listed here are demonstrations of commercial programs and are limited in some way. But some of them do translations to and from languages that AltaVista does not, including Afrikaans, Zulu, Esperanto, Finnish and Russian.

#### -.-.- Other Language Resources -.-.-

If it's a foreign word or phrase that you need translated, the LOGOS Dictionary (<http://www.logos.it/query/query.html>) is mirabolente (wonderful)! The database includes 7.5 million entries in 31 languages. It doesn't do wholesale translation, but it can provide translations for single words or common phrases.

There are hundreds of dictionaries on the Net -- A Web of On-line Dictionaries (<http://www.bucknell.edu/~rbeard/diction.html>) offers links to many of them. If you need to look up words in Brahui, Eggon, Eskimo or Klingon, this site will show you the way. Oh, you can look up English words, too.

Until next week, "affectionate greeting me, thanks."

=\*=\*= SITES MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE =\*=\*=

AltaVista: <http://altavista.digital.com>

List of other free translators: <http://rivendel.com/~ric/resources/dictad-2.html#freetrans>

LOGOS Dictionary: <http://www.logos.it/query/query.html>

A Web of On-line Dictionaries: <http://www.bucknell.edu/~rbeard/diction.html>

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The NetAnswers Internet Extra is free to all CompuServe members. It's available in the Internet Community Forum -- GO INETCOM and look in file library 11, "NetAnswers".

Got comments or ideas for future issues? We want to hear 'em. Just send a message to [savetz@compuserve.com](mailto:savetz@compuserve.com) (74774,2725).

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